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ABSTRACT

In this study it was found that teaching seems to be most effective when it allows a close, friendly relationship with students over a substantial period of time. The most significant faculty-student relationships were seldom described by faculty as impersonal, and almost all such relationships were associated with continuing faculty-student interaction. Teachers who were more accessible and more interactive with students were not merely being friendly or gregarious; they had considerable intellectual impact on students. Most students described the faculty members who contributed most to them as having stimulated them intellectually, demanded high quality work of them, made them feel confident about their abilities, and interested them in the teacher's field. These interactive factors were also characteristic of faculty denoted as intellectually influential by students who became more intellectually oriented over the 4 years. (Author)

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TEACHERS WITH IMPACT

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In 1966, nearly half (45 percent) of a large sample of freshmen entering the University of California at Berkeley said they expected that "getting to know faculty members" would be an important part of their college experience. Yet in 1970, when they were seniors, only about one-fifth of those same Berkeley students said that getting to know faculty actually had been important to them. Before such a finding is dismissed as being limited to the experiences of students in large universities, it should be noted that freshmen's expectations of getting to know teachers in satisfying ways were frequently not realized in other institutions of higher learning as well. Even in cluster colleges such as Raymond at the University of the Pacific and Stevenson College at the University of California, Santa Cruz—where close, personal faculty-student relationships are an avowed mission of the college—the gap between expected and actual satisfactions in this area was also great. On the smaller campuses, however, both the expected and actual importance of knowing faculty were rated considerably higher than at Berkeley. Overall, in eight widely varying institutions* included in our study, only about one-fourth of the seniors graduating in 1970 felt that "getting to know faculty" had played an important role in their undergraduate experience.

What are we to make of such a finding? Was it because the seniors attached little importance to knowing faculty that most did not get to know any, or because, although they did get to know their teachers, they found the experience to be less rewarding than they had imagined it would be when they entered college?

Faculty will be encouraged to learn that the more frequently students interacted with teachers outside the classroom, the more important they felt faculty had been. Of 413 seniors who reported having had fewer than five out-of-class discussions with faculty members during a one-month period, only 9 percent felt that "getting to know faculty" had been important. On the other hand, among 439 seniors who reported 12 or more discussions, 45 percent concluded that their relationships with faculty had been important to them. This may be taken as fairly substantial evidence that faculty can play an acknowledged and important role in the undergraduate experience—at least in those cases where the relationship between a teacher and his students goes beyond the typical classroom setting and becomes an interpersonal one.

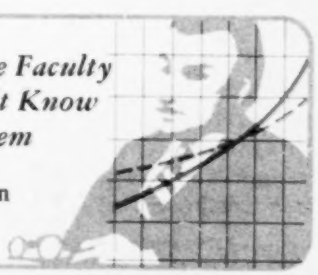
This finding is particularly important in light of recent indictments of higher education which have criticized the absence of close, personal faculty-student interaction. Such interaction is considered not only a means by which the transmission of knowledge or student intellectual growth is best facilitated, but as an educational goal in and of itself. At the core of the criticisms is the assertion that real education cannot take place without it. Interestingly, faculty themselves overwhelmingly support this view: 91 percent of the faculty in these same eight institutions agreed that informal out-of-class contacts with faculty members should be an important part of a student's development. Teachers, like students, however, perceive a gap between the preferred and actual state of affairs on their campuses, for only 58 percent of the faculty felt that "getting to know faculty" currently was an important factor in the education of most of the undergraduates at their institutions.

*Clark College, Georgia; Luther College, Iowa; Monteith College, Michigan; Northeastern Illinois State College; Shimer College, Illinois; Unviersity of the Pacific, California; University of California, Berkeley; University of California, Santa Cruz.

How to Evaluate Faculty When You Don't Know Much About Them

Harold L. Hodgkinson

See p. 5



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The Study

Despite the oft-stated case for close faculty-student interaction, there has been little attempt to establish empirically whether there are educational benefits from interaction, or what these benefits might be. The research reported on here provided a unique opportunity for exploring both the faculty and student correlates of interaction. As part of a joint study of Faculty Impact and Student Development (in preparation)* undertaken at the Center, data were obtained from faculty and students in eight diverse institutions of higher learning. Faculty response rates ranged from 47 percent at the University of California, Berkeley, to 80 percent at Shimer, and student response rates ranged from 35 percent at Clark College in Atlanta to 75 percent at Stevenson College at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Because the student study was longitudinal, certain of the correlates of interaction could be looked at as "consequences," that is, as either self-reported or measured change from freshman to senior year. The use of nomination procedures–whereby students named their most stimulating and influential teachers–afforded additional opportunities for exploring "consequences" of interaction by moving back and forth from student to faculty data.

We recognize that to talk about the "consequences" of any social behavior is to commit a kind of methodological heresy. For there is undeniably an important sense in which only correlates, not consequences, can be delivered. We will therefore, for the most part, take the conservative approach and refer to student and faculty correlates of out-of-class interaction, while at the same time asking you to entertain such correlates as possible "consequences." Thus, we may explore, at least tentatively, the possible implications or "relevance" of these findings for the improvement of college and university teaching.

TABLE 1

Frequency of Interaction Reported by Faculty and Students, in percentages

	FACULTY: Number of different discussions of 10 minutes or more with undergraduates during a two-week period			STUDENTS: Number of different discussions of 10 minutes or more with faculty members during a one-month period		
Subjects of Discussion	None	1–2	3 or more	None	1–2	3 or more
Intellectual issues or course-related matters	3	19	78	36	39	24
Educational plans or advice	15	32	53	29	46	25
Informal conversations or socializing	20	32	48	34	35	30
Career plans or advice	19	43	37	33	44	23
Campus issues or socio-political discourse	37	34	28	53	31	16
Personal problems or counseling	43	42	15	78	18	4

*The faculty part of the study was directed by Robert C. Wilson and Jerry G. Gaff. The student part of the study was directed by Paul A. Heist, David N. Whittaker, Mildred M. Henry, and Sarah Cirese.

The measures of interaction to be discussed here are based on the total number of discussions in six areas of typical concern that students reported having had with faculty, and faculty with students. The six areas of discussion, along with the percentages of faculty and students reporting each can be seen in Table 1. Both students and faculty were divided into three groups, roughly equal in size, for the purpose of comparing high-interactors (the top third) with low-interactors (the bottom third).

The Consequences of Interaction for Students

One correlate of frequent personal interaction with faculty which might be regarded as an important educational consequence for students is an increased commitment to intellectual concerns. For example, on a scale of Intellectual Disposition, as measured by the *Omnibus Personality Inventory* (Heist and Yonge, 1968), students whose intellectual orientations as freshmen were quite moderate, but who increased significantly on this dimension by their senior year, reported more frequent out-of-class interaction with faculty than a matched group of students who did not increase in their intellectual disposition over the four years.

High-interacting students also perceived more than other students that they had made more progress in a variety of specific academic skills (Table 2). They felt, for example, that they had increased their knowledge both of

TABLE 2

The Outcomes for Students of Interaction with Faculty, in percentages

	STUDENTS		
	Low Interactors	Medium Interactors	High Interactors
As seniors reported having made "much progress" in:			
Knowledge or specifics of a field	56	57	68
Knowledge of universals and abstractions in a field	43	48	58
Ability to comprehend, interpret, or extrapolate	49	57	65
Ability to evaluate materials and methods	48	57	67
Ability to apply abstraction or principles	41	46	59
Named a faculty member as "the **one** faculty member who contributed **most** to your educational and/or personal development"	66	80	84
Named a faculty member as having "played a role in your choice of major"	14	24	30
Expected and actual importance of satisfaction received from getting to know faculty members:			
As freshmen	41	43	49
As seniors	9	24	45

specifics, such as terminology or trends, and of universals and abstractions in their major fields. They also felt that they were better able to comprehend or interpret, to evaluate methods and materials, and to apply abstractions or principles to a particular situation. These academic skills are, of course, the stock-in-trade of faculty and among the chief wares which they offer to students. Not surprisingly, course-related or intellectual issues were among the most frequent kinds of out-of-class discussions reported by both faculty and students.

Another important correlate of interaction was a student's willingness, or indeed ability, to name a teacher who had made a major contribution to his educational o. personal development. High-interacting students also significantly more often than others named a faculty member as having "influenced their choice of major" and were more likely to say that one of the reasons for their choice of major was that "faculty encouraged them." These, of course, are rather specific instances of faculty influence; clearly, the more contact with faculty a student generally has, the greater the probability that one or more of his teachers will have some kind of specific impact on him.

There are other correlates which may be "consequences" of interaction. For example high-interacting students expressed significantly greater satisfaction than low-interacting students with their total college experience and with virtually all aspects of it, including course work in their major and independent study in addition to "getting to know faculty members." It is important to note here that high- and low-interactors did not differ significantly in their freshman expectations for getting to know faculty members, only in the extent to which they had actually done so and the importance they attached to it (Table 2).

Finally, high-interacting students appeared to experience themselves as more "together." They seemed to have a greater sense than the low-interactors of who they were and where they were going, both personally and vocationally. They felt that they had a firmer sense of identity, and that they had increased more in self-awareness, in their ability to form close relationships, and in their commitment both to a life style and to a vocation. More of them had chosen an occupation and felt that their choice was "very definite." In terms of "consequences," these occupational choices were differentially made during college. As freshmen the proportion of students who had already made a vocational decision did not differ significantly for the two interaction groups.

The Consequences of Interaction for Faculty

While the idea that interacting with faculty can have beneficial consequences for students is an old idea, the converse—that interacting with students can have beneficial consequences for faculty—is a relatively new one. In his study of faculty influence on students at Columbia, Thielens (1966) concluded that, "Perhaps it is the teacher who benefits most from the contact, as he utilizes what he gains from meeting some of his students to improve his classroom relationship with all [p. 57]." In response to demands for relevance and the necessity of finding ways of teaching new and different kinds of students effectively, many faculty have come to feel that, in some sense, they indeed can be taught by their students.

In light of increased pressures for the evaluation of college teaching, it is interesting to note that faculty who reported the most frequent interaction with students indicated significantly greater support for the establishment of formal evaluation procedures in their institutions. This might well be interpreted as a reflection of their greater self-confidence as effective teachers. Seventy-nine percent of the high-interacting faculty—compared to 59 percent of the low-interactors—felt that there should be such procedures, and significantly more of them felt that students should play a primary role in such evaluations. Having more contact, and thus presumably greater knowledge and understanding of students, appears to make a faculty member more trusting of them. Indeed, in a previous study of faculty-student interaction (Wilson, et al., in preparation) we found that faculty who had the least amount of out-of-class contact with students were not only the most mistrustful of students, but also had the least knowledge of their educational achievements. Those faculty who interacted the least frequently with students were the most likely to say they "didn't know" whether or not their graduates were adequately prepared in reading, writing, creative thinking, and breadth of knowledge. Yet taken together, these areas form a central part of a liberal arts education.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence that out-of-class interaction with students can have educational consequences for teachers is the fact that high-interacting faculty were significantly more often mentioned by students as "teachers who contributed most to their educational or personal development," and as teachers who "played a role in their choice of major (Table 3)." The more out-of-class contact with students a faculty member

TABLE 3
The Outcomes for Faculty of Interaction with Students, in percentages

	FACULTY		
	Low Interactors	Medium Interactors	High Interactors
Received one or more nominations by students as "the **one** faculty member who contributed **most**" to their development	20	29	35
Received one or more nominations by students as having influenced their choice of major	5	9	21
Received one or more nominations by colleagues as an "outstanding teacher"	27	30	48
Received one or more nominations by colleagues as a teacher who has "significant impact on the lives of students"	11	18	41

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reported, the more likely it was that he would receive nominations by students as a helpful teacher. Furthermore, the reputation of high-contact faculty as being influential teachers was held by colleagues as well as students. As can be seen in Table 3, high-interacting faculty also received significantly more nominations by their colleagues both as "outstanding teachers" in their institutions, and as "teachers who seem to have significant impact on the lives of students."

It was clear that high-interacting faculty were more self-confident than their low-interacting colleagues about their own impact on students. More of the former perceived that they had influence on students in such areas as deciding about a major field of study, formulating career plans, and helping to develop a personal philosophy or outlook on life.

Conclusions

It seems evident that there are a number of important educational correlates of out-of-class interaction between faculty and students. If some or all of these correlates are, in fact, consequences of interaction—if such things as student intellectual orientations, specific academic skills, and feelings of personal growth can be facilitated by interaction with faculty beyond the classroom—then it would appear that there are clear implications for the organization and conduct of higher education.

It has been shown that some faculty members spend a great deal of time interacting with their students outside of class, and such time seems to be very well spent in terms of the educational benefits both to students and to themselves. If this important role of college teachers is to be encouraged, it must be rewarded. Out-of-class contacts between faculty and students should become an integral part of the teaching-learning process and the faculty teaching load. Calculations of workload must consider the total amount of time teachers spend with undergraduates both in and out of the classroom—or else the most effective teachers will be shortchanged, even penalized, for extending their teaching into activities outside the classroom.

There are implications for individual faculty members as well. If contact with students does lead to greater knowledge and understanding of student abilities and achievements and to a greater sense of one's own effectiveness as a teacher, then it appears that the teacher who is too preoccupied with other duties and activities to spend much time with his students may be missing out on some of the significant intrinsic rewards of teaching. And in an era of increasing concern for teaching ability and its evaluation, and to the extent that interaction with students is acknowledged by both colleagues and students to be related to teaching effectiveness, he may miss out on some extrinsic rewards as well.

In this study it was found that teaching seems to be most effective when it allows for a close, friendly relationship with students over a substantial period of time. The most significant faculty-student relationships were seldom described by faculty as "impersonal," and almost all such relationships were associated with continuing faculty-student interaction. Teachers who were more accessible and more interactive with students were not merely being friendly or gregarious; they had considerable intellectual impact on students. Most students described the faculty members who contributed most to them as having stimulated them intellectually, demanded high quality work of them, made them feel confident about their abilities, and interested them in the teacher's field. These interactive factors were also characteristic of faculty nominated as intellectually influential by students who became more intellectually disposed over the four years.*

The findings of this study support those of previous studies of student-faculty interaction beyond the classroom, as summarized by Feldman and Newcomb (1969): Despite what is clearly a widespread willingness to assert the importance of meaningful interpersonal encounters between students and teachers, such relationships, according to the reports of both students and faculty, are rare. If this critical factor in improving the educational experience is to be made use of, institutions of higher learning will evidently have to make conscious and careful efforts to foster it.

*A fuller treatment of the study upon which this article is based will appear in Vol. II of a two-volume work of Studies of Faculty, by Gaff, J.G., Wilson, R.C., Wood, G., Dienst, E.R., and Bavry, J.L. Berkeley: Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California. (in preparation)

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